

February 15, 2015

Committee on Children Public Hearing Testimony

Raised Bill No. 6725 AN ACT CONCERNING ANIMAL-ASSISTED THERAPY SERVICES

Dear members of the Committee on Children, thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify
IN SUPPORT of H.B. 6725.

I am an active member of Tails of Joy, Inc. with registered therapy animals through Pet Partners, an internationally recognized therapy animal organization. Tails of Joy, Inc., an all-volunteer animal assisted therapy group serving Hartford, Tolland and Windham counties was established in 1995 to provide therapy visits with dogs and other animals to those who need comfort or company in a variety of settings. Tails of Joy began an internal process of developing Crisis Response Teams in the spring of 2013 and has training and evaluation protocols for Crisis Response Teams, with nine teams currently assessed and approved for this type of call-out.

Tails of Joy has collaborated with State Representative Diana Urban and other therapy groups throughout the state to draft the proposed legislation being considered today. The goal is to ensure that the legislation be clear and that it be consistent with some of the animal assisted activities and therapeutic work currently being done in the aftermath of a tragedy in our state. The value of professionally delivered animal assisted therapy and activities by trained and experienced volunteers has been well documented. Unfortunately, an uncoordinated response to crises by well-intentioned pet owners without professional affiliations, experience, or appropriate training in animal assisted activities adds to the confusion and chaos of an immediate crisis situation, with the possibility that the safety of those being served will be compromised. We also wanted to ensure that the legislation was divided into three distinct parts: The training of Department of Children and Families staff on the healing value of the human-animal bond, the statewide coordinated volunteer animal critical incident response team and the provision of ongoing animal assisted therapy by mental health professionals. The proposed language in Raised Bill No. 6725 accomplishes all of that! This legislation is important to facilitate the coordination of this important, professionally delivered service by trained volunteers in a responsible manner during times of crisis in our state.

I thank you for considering my testimony on this important piece of legislation.

Respectfully submitted,

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